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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3547

INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHZN/ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEAHLC/DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA PRIORITY

RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 000379

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ELA, AIAG FOR WINN AND LANGE

USAID FOR CARROLL AND HILL

USDA/APHIS FOR ANNELLIS

DHS FOR MCGINN

HHS FOR BELL

AMMAN FOR WHITTLESEY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [EAGR](#) [TBIO](#) [KFLU](#) [AMED](#) [EAID](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR INTERAGENCY AVIAN INFLUENZA TEAM,
FEBRUARY 19-21, 2007

REF: A) CAIRO 22 B) CAIRO 154

Sensitive but unclassified, please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Embassy Cairo warmly welcomes the visit of Ambassador John Lange and the interagency avian influenza team. We are looking forward exchanging ideas on local avian influenza challenges, potential areas of enhanced cooperation, and developing a more cohesive interagency strategy.

VIRUS STATUS: HUMANS AND POULTRY

¶2. (SBU) As of February 2007, the GOE confirmed twenty human cases of H5N1 virus, resulting in twelve fatalities. All six human victims since September 2006 have succumbed to the disease. According to the WHO, in 2006 Egypt had the highest number of human cases outside Asia. In January 2007, CDC confirmed NAMRU's diagnosis that the virus responsible for the deaths of human cases 17 and 18 was Tamiflu resistant (ref A). Case 19 did not show the same resistance to Tamiflu (ref B) nor did the most recent death of a 17-year-old from Fayyoum on February 4.

¶3. (SBU) In broader terms, mutations in specimens from recent cases show Egypt could be acting as a type of &mixing bowl& for diverse strains of H5N1 originating thousands of miles away. This is likely due to the fact that Egypt is located on two major avian flight paths and millions of migratory birds fly over the country annually.

¶4. (SBU) On January 28, the Minister of Health and Population (MOHP) Hatem El Gebali announced the formation of a committee to study use of alternative drugs to Tamiflu. The Regional Medical Office at Embassy Cairo is also preparing receive as shipment of a second antiviral medication called Zanamivir (Relenza) as a backup medication.

We are scheduled to get enough to treat 23% of the official Embassy population. We are also acquiring additional doses of the older antiviral medication amantadine.

¶5. (SBU) The initial AI outbreak in February, 2006 devastated Egypt's poultry industry, and resulted in

significant layoffs and estimated losses of at least \$100 million. The GOE placed a widely enforced ban on live bird markets and backyard poultry raising in Cairo. Commercial farmers began a stringent vaccination campaign, which continues today. The commercial sector is almost universally AI free. According to official MOHP figures, since February 2006, there have been 859 outbreak sites in the commercial poultry sector, but only one since July 2006.

¶6. (SBU) The &backyard8 poultry sector is ground zero for both poultry and human AI infections in Egypt, largely due to the fact that in rural areas, people live with poultry and slaughter it in their homes. MOHP figures show a recent upsurge in the number of backyard AI cases. Of the 244 backyard sites identified since February 2006, 50 were identified during the period of December 2006-January 2007. Consequently, 18 of the 20 human cases were backyard farmers. Live poultry markets are up and running again both in Cairo and in rural areas. Rooftop poultry raising is again common in Cairo.

¶7. (SBU) During the initial AI outbreaks, the highest levels of government recognized the need to greatly reform the poultry sector. At a March 5, 2006 meeting with poultry producers, Prime Minister Nazif stressed the need to transform Egypt's poultry industry, calling for a move from small-scale farming and live-bird trade to large-scale modern production at collocated breeding and processing facilities which would be subject to governmental health and environmental oversight. The government is in the planning stages of these reforms.

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BRIEF OF YOUR MEETINGS

¶8. (SBU) In addition to meetings with Embassy Cairo's Avian Influenza Working Group (AIWG), Ambassador Ricciardone, and NAMRU, we are requesting the following non-Embassy meetings:

---Minister of Health and Population Hatem El Gebali. Undersecretary Dr. Nasr El Sayed, an infectious disease expert and our main interlocutor at the Ministry on AI, will likely accompany the Minister at the meeting.

---Minister of Agriculture Amin Abaza. Dr. Mona Mahrez and Dr. Ahmed Tawfik, Chairman of the General Organization of Veterinary Services, will likely accompany the Minister at this meeting. Giza Governor Fathi Saad, who leads the MOA's technical committee on AI, may also attend.

---Tour of Central Public Health Labs, Dr. Hala Esmat. All suspected human cases are initially analyzed at this lab facility. Dr. Esmat works closely with NAMRU.

---Tour of Ministry of Agriculture labs, Dr. Mona Aly Mahrez. All suspected poultry cases are analyzed at this lab.

---Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Counselor Omar Abou Eiche, Environmental Affairs, and Minister Plenipotentiary Mohamed Aboul Dahab, American Affairs.

---World Health Organization (WHO): Dr. Mohammed Jama, Deputy Regional Director, and Dr. Zuhair Hallaj and Hassan El-Bushra, Division of Communicable Diseases.

---Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO): Country Rep. Dr. Ahmed Chikhaoui and Regional Rep Dr. Talib Ali.

---Abbassiya Chest Hospital. Ten of the twenty human cases were treated in this hospital, adjacent to NAMRU.

---Visit to Kohia Poultry Farms, Bilbis. Bassim Kohia, owner of this commercial poultry farm 45 minutes north of Cairo,

will lead the tour.

---World Food Program consultants Mohy Sabry, Nargis Labib, Dr. Farid Hosni. WFP hired this team to draft a consolidated national plan on avian influenza. They expect to be done with the plan by February 19.

---The Deputy Chief of Mission plans to host a reception in your honor on February 20 at his residence. A wide range of ministry officials, international donor agencies, private sector representatives, and third country diplomats, in addition to Embassy staff working on AI, will be invited. This will be an excellent opportunity for you to engage informally with the AI community.

---Press will be very limited and coordinated directly with the Ministry of Health.

RICCIARDONE